

VZCZCXRO4143
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK RUEHMOS
DE RUEHGB #1021/01 0871252
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 281252Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3592
INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BAGHDAD 001021

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/28/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SCIRI PM NOMINEE ADEL ABDEL MEHDI SLAMS JAFARI IN
PRESS

Classified By: COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD FOR
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a March 26 article in government financed independent Al-Sabah newspaper (Iraq's most widely read), SCIRI leader Adil Abd al-Mahdi noted that he would not accept the Prime Minister nomination without "a full and clear mandate from the Unified Iraqi Coalition and other blocs" but firmly skewered the Prime Minister's competence. He hinted that the UIC may still nominate multiple new candidates for the post. Some of our other Shia Islamist Coalition contacts think that Abd al-Mahdi may yet revive his prime minister candidacy. The text of the March 26 interview is found below. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Shia Islamist Coalition insider Qassem Daoud told us March 27 that he thought Deputy President Adil Abd al-Mahdi could make another try at overturning Ibrahim Jafari as the Shia Islamist Coalition's candidate for the prime ministry. Daoud pointed to the March 26 interview in al-Sabah newspaper as a clear trial balloon from Abd al-Mahdi. Daoud, who strongly supports Abd al-Mahdi's bid, said that the Deputy President needs to get Shia Islamist Coalition leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim on board, and he isn't yet.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: In the interview, Mahdi brought out heavy rhetorical artillery, making clear Ja'fari is not the man for the prime ministership, hinting at the fragility of any leader's mandate, and noting that the UIC may still put forward other nominees for the Prime Ministry. By positing in the newspaper interview an even more complex scenario (multiple new candidates from within the Shia Coalition), he may be sending final notice to Shiites who are hedging on the UIC parliamentary split. This may force SCIRI and its religious supporters in the Shia community to solidify the anti-Ja'fari front. END COMMENT.

¶4. (SBU) Below is the informal Embassy translation of the March 26 al-Sabah interview. (Al-Sabah, an independent but government financed newspaper is the most widely read in Iraq. It's chief editor, Mohammed Abdul-Jabbar al-Shabbout, is a political rival of Jafari's, and an active member of the Islamic Democratic Trend Party. Headings are added by the Embassy to provide summaries for the reader.

(U) BEGIN TEXT:

Introduction Explains UIC Still Debating
Between Mahdi and al-Ja'fari

"There has been much speculation . . . associated with the issue of the United Iraqi Coalition's (UIC) nominee to head the government and its implications inside the UIC and among other political blocs. These opinions span 180

degrees, from complete rejection to full support. . . in the middle you find those with reservations. The UIC's final contest was set between Adil Abdul Mahdi, the politician well known for his wisdom and struggle against the dictator's regime for three decades, and Ibrahim al-Ja'fari, who exhibits the same qualities and who emerged as the winner at the end. When this result was reached, discussions and differences surfaced among the Iraqi people and Iraqi parties. . . driven by the result and by other factors, including the delay in government formation. As-Sabah has interviewed one of the contestants, Adil Abdul Mahdi, whose frankness, objectivity, and accuracy help . . . accommodate the concerns of the country and people."

The Race with Ja'fari

"Q: Why did you nominate yourself against al-Ja'fari?

A: I didn't.

Q: What happened then?

A: I was nominated by others within the UIC, as was the case with other candidates.

Q: Why did the UIC resort to a vote and no agreement was reached?

A: Some candidates withdrew. I didn't see anyone's interests served by withdrawing, while my brother al-Ja'fari didn't agree to withdraw.

Q: Why didn't you withdraw like the last time?

A: Because we see, but we could be wrong, that al-Ja'fari faces two obstacles at this stage.

Q: Which are?

A: The lack of strong support in and outside of the UIC, and the experience during his term in office that has created a conviction that the country needs a change. There are issues of (self interests), but we should not forget

BAGHDAD 00001021 002 OF 004

that nothing other than friendship and respect joins me with my brother al-Ja'fari, and I was one of his greatest supporters during the last nomination. We refused the UIC candidate to be decided in any manner other than agreement, and the same thing applies to the Bremer-Ibrahimi (UN Special Advisor Lakhdar al-Ibrahimi) government. You will find this mentioned clearly in Bremer's book, where he talks of a meeting between Bremer and myself in which I told him that if al-Ja'fari would gain the approval of the Shiite House, then I personally and SCIRI would support him, and we have no problem with that. So I believe we have proven what we have said previously. As for hidden intentions, only God can judge those. We have proven that we conduct ourselves regardless of any personal interests.

Q: But you expressed support for him after he won the UIC's vote?

A: That's true, and it is evidence again that these issues are not personal."

Contradictions in Stance?

"Q: Do see some contradiction in this, have you changed your opinion regarding the two conditions you mentioned?

A: No, there is no contradiction, if al-Ja'fari gains the necessary support, we will not hesitate to back him.

There's a difference between what you believe in and . . . rules and laws without which chaos would prevail. You might not support traffic laws that make you stop at the red traffic light, and proceed on green, or sticking to the right side of the road. For your beliefs to become rules, therefore, they should be accepted, and until this occurs, you should abide by the current law and system.

Q: This can be said about acceptance, what about conditions and special qualities?

A: Acceptance is an introduction to conditions and special qualities. When you find that you enjoy acceptance among others, this is an indication that they see you meet the conditions, although this is not always true, but it is the

closest logic, otherwise, discussions and arguments would go on endlessly. Therefore, if acceptance is found, we can assume that conditions are met.

Q: But some say al-Ja'fari enjoys people's support?

A: This is dangerous. The UIC has participated in establishing constitutional bases allowing the public to express its opinion. The people voted on the constitution before electing 275 parliament members and they are the ones who represent the Iraqi people. A soccer player, poet, or national leader could enjoy more support than any minister, Prime Minister, or President. The political process is not what a single person believes or a certain sector believes, it is what the process's rules, constitution, and law imply. They who will decide the form of the coming intuitions are the 275 parliamentarians, otherwise, we will go back to the mentality of coups, and Iraq has had enough of these concepts that say the army wants me, or the nation wants me, or that I'm the candidate of the U.S. or Iran. Political entities and their representation in the parliament are the ones to make the decisions, taking into consideration the will of the people, and these decisions should never be personal ones, we have the two-thirds majority, we have consensus, and other rules approved by the constitution. This is what we should deal with sincerely, and any other talk is unacceptable."

I'm Not the "B" Team

"Q: What if al-Ja'fari decided to step down or was ousted. Does this mean that you will be the replacement?

A: No.

Q: Why?

A: Because I'm not the substitute player. And as I mentioned in my answer to the first question, I did not nominate myself to be a replacement for brother al-Ja'fari.

Q: Who is the replacement then?

A: He will be the one who gains clear support and meets the demands of the current significant stage that should be reflected by a PM and who can preserve the national unity and the unity of the UIC.

Q: What if you were proposed to assume the post?

A: I will not accept unless conditions are met, which are for the UIC's nominee to enjoy a strong and clear mandate from his bloc and other blocs which allows him comfortable support with the Council of Representatives.

Q: What are the personal aspects you criticize of al-Ja'fari and believe you can offer an alternative?

A: This is not the place for criticism or self-praise. A

BAGHDAD 00001021 003 OF 004

doctor knows what qualities should be available in a person so that he can be titled a doctor. The qualities for the post of PM aren't a mystery and they are well known throughout the world and in Iraq also.

Q: But some say the PM will have advisors assigned and rules set?

A: All of this is true and is required with any PM, but can a person other than a doctor be assigned advisors and have rules set before him and then be asked to carry out a doctor's duties? The appropriate candidate is the one that gains the necessary approval which indicates that required conditions are met, and this applies to brother al-Ja'fari and any other. But if the candidate doesn't enjoy the necessary support, then any talk of assigning advisors or setting rules is only an attempt to escape taking the right decisions.

Q: What could happen if the current situation continues, meaning that al-Ja'fari refuses to step down, and the UIC and other blocs refuse to change their positions? Can the country continue without a real government, parliament, and other institutions?

A: This situation cannot be accepted and it is the worst of options. I have said previously that we face three

options: Either al-Ja'fari steps down, or other blocs change their position, or the Council of Representatives looks into its options according to the constitution and election results."

What About a Stalemate?

"Q: Assuming that the situation remains the same, how can the Council of Representatives make a decision? Are there mechanisms for that purpose since the constitution doesn't state a solution for such a case, especially that the UIC is the largest bloc and should be the one to nominate the PM?

A: If the situation remains the same with no side changing its position and the blocs fails to come up with a solution since no individual bloc can secure the two thirds majority needed, in this case, and to preserve the unity of the UIC and positive relations with other blocs, the UIC could consider submitting a number of candidates from the coalition to assume the post of PM, and this will allow the UIC and its partners to have their say. This option . . . is a constitutional solution which preserves the unity of the UIC and preserves the participation of other blocs to choose the PM of Iraq, all of Iraq, and such solutions will guarantee that election results are taken into consideration and allow for national participation to break the deadlock.

Q: But the nomination of PM should follow the election of the Presidential Council. So how can the process go ahead in a way that guarantees the candidate supported by the majority will reach the post?

A: Either new agreements are made in the case of the UIC changing its nominee for PM and naming another candidate through agreement within the UIC or by gaining a semi unanimous approval which would make it hard for other blocs to refuse him, or for the UIC to present more than one candidate as mentioned earlier, or for other blocs to abandon their objection to al-Ja'fari's nomination. If the UIC was to present more than one candidate, a kind of agreement could be reached before the voting process takes place, or even an unofficial session for the Council of Representatives can be held in which the candidate who is being voted on is chosen before the actual vote according to the constitution, or any other type of solution approved by the blocs and representatives."

No Room for Individual Stands or Dictated Policies

"Q: Wouldn't that be seen as pressuring the UIC or imposing an option other than what it voted for?

A: It could be seen like that, but the issue shouldn't be dealt with as if we were fighting enemies. There are some opinions inside the UIC and others outside it, and one of the conditions by the UIC is for other blocs to accept the PM and vice versa. We refuse and will continue to refuse running the country in a way that excludes us or harms our interests, and anyone speaking with this logic should stress that we cannot run this country alone or according to our interests only. We refuse oppression and individualism in running the country whether it came from us or from anyone else, we will oppose both with the same vigor. All decisions on behalf of Iraqis should be accepted by Iraqis or at least by their parliamentary majority, or sometimes, by their components, but we should not accept any dictated or individual stands that favor a

BAGHDAD 00001021 004 OF 004

certain party at the expense of others, therefore, we have spoken of the possibility of changing the position within the UIC or the positions of the other blocs. Any inappropriate position taken by ourselves or others should not be supported, and the right actions should be the issues that unite us."

"Q: But this government term is four years?

A: This is not true, the Council of Representatives' term lasts for four years, as for the cabinet and the PM they could be ousted one day after formation, or may not gain confidence at all, or on the contrary, it could outlive the Council of Representatives if it gained confidence. We're not choosing a Pope or a monarch, we are choosing a government and a PM that can submit his resignation or be subject to a no confidence vote at any event, and there was an attempt to oust al-Ja'fari's government last September and we strictly opposed the attempt since it would have endangered the constitutional process. Nothing is sacred or personal in all of this. Resignation is a tool in the hands of the president, PM, or any other senior or junior official; it represents a point of strength for the official to defend his point of view when he enjoys large support, or to allow others to exercise their points of view when he fails to gather the necessary support for his own position. This is the way governments are run, and it was the way the government was run in Iraq before being suppressed by authoritarian trends, where after that, the resignation of an official became a sort of insult instead of being a source of strength. We are confident that the new men of Iraq are not of the authoritarian type, they were the victims of the tyranny and suppression. We should establish the tradition of fear from the official's resignation, not from his authority. A successful official is the one that empowers the post and not one who is empowered by the post."

Q: If other sides have objected to the UIC nominee, can the UIC object to others' nominees?

A: Why not, if the UIC has the logical reason to object to any nominee, it can ask the political bloc to which the nominee belongs to change their nominee for the post in question. I believe the PM will not accept a single nominee for each post, but will choose from among a number of nominees to determine the suitable person for the post and the mission to be performed. President Talabani has said that if he was to be refused by the UIC or the Iraqi Accord Front he would go back to Sulaimaniya. The issue is about identifying the interests and specifying what would be beneficial for the country according to the constitution and law. If we accept these standards to be applied to ourselves, then we would have every reason to apply it to others, and the beneficiary of this situation at the end would be the UIC, the rest of the blocs, and the Iraqi people with all its components." End informal translation.

KHALILZAD